

## **Coming Home**



**Trying to cope with reverse culture shock**  
**Mark Gyde**

## Coming Home

### Trying to cope with reverse culture shock

#### Introduction

Over the last few years I have been involved in sending a number of people on short term mission trips and have watched how they've coped with going out and more importantly how they come back. I'm writing this out of that experience and I trust it will be helpful to you.

Before leaving for a trip there is always a lot to do in terms of planning and preparation, obtaining visas, making travel plans and finding out as much as you can about what you will be doing. You learn about the environment you'll be in and whether there are any cultural challenges you might have to face. Of course, research is not the same as *actually* experiencing it but it is good to go through this planning and preparation stage.



Adrenalin kicks in and you have the extra energy which you need as you plan this exciting journey and time away from home. There is the excitement and anticipation of being somewhere new, meeting new people, experiencing new places and ways of doing things. A dream, maybe a long term dream, is about to be realised. When you arrive at the new place you meet a group of new people and your adventure then becomes a shared adventure and experience. This community and family helps you as when one is down another may be up and able to lift you up from your despondency.



My experience is that after about two or three months people start to feel homesick and begin to miss all their home comforts. Maybe the frustrations of the new culture lose their romantic appeal and a harsh reality kicks in. This can be a very unsettling period of time bringing out many insecurities and fears. Being away at something like INS also brings many heart issues to the fore and, being in a safe environment, these can be dealt with. This process may not be easy, it may be intense as deep pain surfaces but there is a sense and reality of being "in it together".



## Coming Home

Coming back after being away can be a very different story. In your sub-conscious you believe you are coming home, back to the routine and back to the familiar. After a few weeks you discover that it does not *feel* like home as you miss the family and new relationships which you have made. What was familiar is no longer familiar and you may not have a routine. Indeed what was once familiar may be the very thing that you have sought to leave behind in order that it does **not** become familiar again.

The simple solution is to default back to how everything was before you left but that would imply a lot of the changes and paradigm shifts that you have been through would need to be undone. The new way of thinking and living would fall away and be replaced by the old traditions.

And so what was home no longer feels quite as secure. What was routine can look like legalism or religion. You now have new wine but you do not want to put it into the old wineskin, at the same time though you are not sure what the new wineskin looks like. In your heart you want to respond to the cry in Isaiah 43:19 *"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."*

The reality is you feel that you are in limbo. You miss the excitement and newness of your recent experience, you do not want to go back to 'Egypt' but you are not quite sure what the promised land looks like. In fact, you may not even be sure that the promised land even exists.



The major things you miss are the sense of community, belonging, being part of a shared experience and identity. All of which disappears the moment you come home. Instead of belonging you feel alone. Instead of community you feel isolated. Instead of a shared experience you are back to survival and

independence. Questions begin to surface: was it worth it, did God really say, did I really change, why don't people understand me, can't they see that I'm different and have changed, why don't my family and friends 'get it'. These are all natural and part of the process of re-integrating into what was normal life.

What you are going through is a bereavement. You have left friends behind, you have left intimacy behind, you have left an environment of the Father's love and presence behind, you have left the shared experience behind and probably most importantly you have left that sense of community behind. You have gone back to churches, families or workplaces where little has changed whilst you've been away. You have had the 'wow' experience whilst they have plodded on. Inevitably they have a range of responses from being enquiring and interested to apathy, thinking you'll get over it sometime soon.

With any bereavement, those not affected move on and back to their 'normal' life much sooner than you will. In fact, for you **normal can never be normal again.**

Let me try and give you some pointers which I hope will help.

### **Keep the memories alive**

What were the highlights of being away? Write them down and re-visit them regularly. What did Father say to you? Write it down and as you read and re-read it let it become food for your soul. Be like King David who spoke life into his heart and soul whenever he felt despondent. What were the things Father did in your heart? Write them down and come back to them regularly with thankfulness and gratitude. A thankful heart becomes a full heart.

Do you have a favourite photograph? Have it framed and put it somewhere where you'll see it regularly. When you look at it do so with thankfulness and faith rather than pining for what you've left behind.

This is what God told Joshua to do when the people had crossed over the Jordan river (Joshua 4); they created a memory to remind them of all God had done.



### Something new

Your experience at INS was that of doing something new. Now it is over the question is 'what is next?'. Take up a new hobby or activity. Make it a habit to go to new places – even if it is only a different coffee shop to your usual one. Seek to add new things to your routine in order to maintain a forward momentum. Doing everything as you did before leads to settling.

Many of you will have gone back to your old jobs or churches. Be thankful for Father's provision but even there try to create a freshness; maybe take a different route to work, rearrange your desk or office, go for a different walk at lunchtime, *have* a lunch break, talk to different people. In church talk to people about your experience, give them a sample talk to listen to, lend them a book. Try a new activity, join a new small group. Try not to fall back into the old routine as that will suck you backward.



If you don't have a job look for some voluntary work. Churches still do a lot of good work in the community. It may not be your normal church but seek out a project that interests you and become involved. Of course, churches are not the only organisations that do voluntary work there are lots of possibilities.



### Something old

One of the things a lot of people feel is a disconnect with the world around them, the one they left behind. As well as finding new things to do and to be involved with it is also helpful to take up something you **enjoyed** doing before you left for INS. That gives you an anchor in life and in the midst of seeking the new path provides some stability and re-kindles something familiar.

It can be anything from a regular event or meeting, connecting with old friends or going for a walk in the park. It is just something that anchors you back into life.

### **Live in the present**

It's easy to live in the past but then you are looking back at something that is no longer a reality. Live in the present with the eye of faith which looks to the future. Faith is the belief and knowledge that the things you hope for **will** become a present reality. Faith **draws** them into the present.

### **Find or develop community**

The biggest thing you miss is community. Can you re-discover it? Without it you feel alone and loneliness is a desperate feeling, it leaves you empty. Are there like minded people you can meet with to share, talk and have fun together. Are there people who are interested in what has happened to you and may want to experience something themselves. Are there open hearts that are hungry for life.

For a three year period we met with a group of friends each week, we had a meal together and just shared life. It was simple yet a powerful time.



On my website there are loads of resources which are freely available. Why not join us for the weekly webcast, why not watch an archive recording in your group, why not take one of the books (mine, James and Denise Jordan or Trevor Galpin) and use them in a discussion group. Invite one of us to come to your group via Skype. (<http://afathertoyou.com>)

I understand something of this lonely walk as most of my close friends do not live anywhere near me. It is hard to maintain community but for me it is essential if I am to keep walking the walk and going deeper.

### **Stay connected**

You have made friends for life (and eternity) during INS. Do whatever you can to stay in touch, we are so fortunate with the technology we have. Do whatever you can to meet up; seek out any events that are happening and try to meet together, go on holiday together. Have fun together.



Schedule a group Skype with a few close friends from INS and talk about what Father did, re-live the memories, talk through your struggles, celebrate your successes and remind one another of your hopes and dreams.

### **The heart**

Father pours his love into our hearts. He does not pour it into our mind in the hope that one day it will drop into our heart. During your time at INS you have opened your heart in a deeper way in order to receive more and more of this extravagant love. Our hearts are vulnerable and, once opened, we need to guard them. We need to be diligent in guarding our heart as it has become the source of life for us. We are learning to stop living from the mind, deciding



what is right and wrong, but instead we are living out of the fullness of this new relationship with Father.

Jesus came that we might have life and life in **all** its fullness. The journey of the heart is a one that pursues life. It saddens me how many people start the journey and then give up for one reason or another. I actually think they don't mean to give up rather they are like the seed that started to grow but then got choked by other things that were around.

We have found the pearl of great price, the treasure in the field. Our hearts have been set free. Our hearts have experienced life. Many things will come along to suck you away (we have an enemy who seeks to kill, steal and destroy) but keep your heart soft, open and guarded.

### **Homecoming**

I have called this article 'Coming Home' for two reasons. The first is the obvious one of coming back to your family and friends, your house, your job and the routine of what you left behind all those months ago. The second is to help you keep alive what you have experienced: the homecoming of your heart.

Sonship is within you. Sonship is the realisation that God has always been your Father and you have always been his daughter or son. Sonship is knowing you are continually being loved by the perfect and complete love of the Father and that he is being a Father to YOU.

Sonship is not based on our performance or activity. It is not something we earn, it is simply a gift. We know our salvation is through faith in Christ alone but we have come to the realisation that we have been maintaining it through a gospel of works. **And this simply does not work for us anymore.** We have laid down the gospel of works and started living according to the true gospel: the gospel of love.

Our hearts have come home and my encouragement as we move forward is to live in this ongoing homecoming so every day we hear the Father speak to us saying “you are my beloved son I love you” “you are my beloved daughter I love you”. We can never step outside of his love. We do not need to fear condemnation or guilt. We can live in a wide open space living freely and lightly.

### **And finally...**

*See what kind of love the Father has lavished on us; he loved us so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life and those who receive him and believe in his name are given the right to become children of God, for that is who we are.  
(1 John 3:1, John 3:16, John 1:12)*

*He is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction, to the comfort of your table laden with choice food. (Job 36:16)*

*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. (Matthew 11:28-30 The Message)*

